

*Connection between Irreligion
and Immorality.*

Nº 9

A

ERMON

PREACH'D AT

MARY'S in OXFORD,

AT THE

SSIZES:

Before the HONOURABLE

r. JUSTICE DENNISON

AND

Mr. SERJEANT BIRCH,

AND BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY;

On *March* 1. 1743-4.

EDWARD BENTHAM B.D.

Fellow of *Oriel* College.

OXFORD,

at the THEATRE for *James Fletcher* in the *Turl*,
Sold by *John Rivington* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*,
don. 1744.

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GUALT. HODGES

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And even as they did not like to retain God in their Knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.

IT is scarce possible to conceive a more hideous and ill-favoured representation of mankind than what is given us in this chapter, which describes a great part of the *Gentil* world, as labouring under a complication of vices, and utterly divested of every virtue both Social and Personal. --- One would have thought that such a series of brutal affections could have sprung from nothing else than the dregs of brutal ignorance: Whereas *St Paul*, as he acquits some of the *Gentils* from the general charge (c. 2. 15.) as *shewing forth* (by their good actions no doubt) *the work of the Law written in their hearts*, so he charges this defection from moral rectitude, not to a gross stupidity, but to a neglect or
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abuse of their understandings in matters of Religion. He tells us (v. 18.) that they *had a knowledge of God*, tho' they *held it in unrighteousness*, (19.) their minds were amply stored with *natural notices*, but they spoiled all by their perverse *reasonings* or *disputings* (v. 21.) they in fact *commenc'd fools* by a ridiculous *affectation of seeming wise* (22.) Whatever essays of *Criticism* they made (for something of that kind is probably implied in the Greek word *ἐδοκίμασαν*), the result it seems, was to stifle all concern about God and his Providence: As far as foolish *thinking* could do it, they were resolv'd to banish God out of the World and to renounce his Dominion. — Wherefore God on his part is said to *have given them over to a reprobate mind*, or in the Psalmist's phrase, to *have given them up unto their own hearts lusts, and let them follow their own inventions*. And these were so far from exalting their nature to that degree of ideal perfection, which they might fondly have imagined, that they fell much beneath the standard of common virtue, the *τὸ κατ' ἄνθρωπον*, and at length came to practise without remorse what can scarce be thought of without Horror. v. 29, 30 &c.

* Cic. Off. L. 1. sub init.

The connection between Irreligion and Immorality, however it may be dissembled or overlooked, is frequently asserted in Holy Scripture, and it is evidently supposed in the tenor of the Laws of this our Country.

The H. Scripture in this particular represents Almighty God as an active Governour of the World, as interesting himself and interposing by particular Providence, as far as is consistent with the freedom of Man's nature, and as resenting all habitual neglect and affront offered to himself.

It might easily be shewn, that as the doctrine of God's concurring with human endeavours by secret communications of his Grace carries nothing in it inconsistent with sober reason, so the supposition of his withdrawing his Grace from such as do despite to his Spirit is quite agreeable to that image under which both Reason and Scripture have represented Him *viz.* that of a Father affectionately tender of the Happiness of his Children, but jealous of his honour, resisting the proud, and casting out the froward and rebellious from any further participation of his Favour.

But, not to divert You from the consideration of a subject very important to the welfare of Civil Society, and directly suited to the
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occasion of the present Solemnity, by entering into a dispute concerning the *manner* in which it is effected, I shall wave the distinct, consideration of divine Grace, and endeavour,

- I. To shew that an irreligious disposition is naturally productive of Immorality.
- II. — illustrate the truth of the Observation by Historical Fact.
- III. — conclude with some practical reflections.

I. Now the moral duties here referr'd to are those relating to our Neighbour and Ourselves; since no doubt can be made but that the *retaining God in our knowledge* is necessary to the performance of what we owe to God.

First, Let us consider those which relate to our Neighbour. And these certainly have their foundation in the condition and circumstances of mankind: We all have a sense of pleasure and pain, happiness and misery: We feel within ourselves the unreasonableness of any attempt to deprive us of our happiness, and may without difficulty apprehend it to be an object equally desirable in the eyes of others, who are made like ourselves. This

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substitution of ourselves in the place of others is, in cases of this nature, a sure and certain touchstone of what is just and right, and consequently should recommend the observance of it upon the foot of Reason. But are we really ready to quit our claim to the title of reasonable creatures, whenever we counteract such Dictates of Conscience? or, Do we not sometimes rather pride ourselves therein as a display of greater perfection in the faculty itself, and of more skilful dexterity in the use of it? — A security we may indeed promise ourselves with regard to other men's behaviour, that no injury will be done us so long as they have no temptation to do it, — a season, in which the strictest regard to what is right may be expected from the most villainous disposition. But what provision does this afford for the only cases which want a provision — the controlling our affections when they become inordinate? — 'Tis in this conflict of jarring interests that lies the difficulty. Reason (I mean the reason of each individual) will persuade — to what? — to secure the happiness of others, if it may be done conveniently, but at all hazards to secure our own. It may be said, the primary, the beneficial use of Reason is to guide our
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Being into what is easy and comfortable: Why then should it forego, in favour of another, the enjoyment of what we want ourselves? Call it Knavery! — The Sufferer will call it so — The Oppressor, if it succeeds, will glory in it as art and policy; the former exclaims against it as shocking to nature, the latter pleases himself with having done the thing that was expedient — irksome indeed to another but advantageous to himself.

With regard to those duties which immediately concern Ourselves, the character of a virtuous good man, conscious of the dignity of his nature, and inflexibly resolved to maintain it against every base and ignoble suggestion of appetite, is a picture that cannot fail to give us pleasure in the beholding — it is what every man will be apt to wish may prove his own, and what no man quits his pretensions to but with reluctance.

But here again, if this ideal pleasure, that we might receive from the contemplation of our own virtue be destroy'd by a canker of Lust, that gnaws within us, and will not rest satisfied without the sacrifice of this darling of our Understanding — if the beauty of what we ourselves admire and reverence is overseen or despised by Others, — Will it not seem a per-

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pertinent question, What profit is there in our virtue when we go down into the pit? — Our wise Appetites will answer, yea, our Understanding will answer itself, *^a Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present; and let us speedily use the creatures like as in Youth: Let us fill ourselves with costly wine — Let us crown ourselves with rose buds — Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness; Let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place: for this is our portion, and our lot is this.* — This is the saying of the Libertine which he praises in conversation, to this agrees his practice, and to this therefore may his opinions be supposed to agree. But what saith the spirit of Religion? *^b Rejoice, O Young man, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy Youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* — How deadly is this remembrance to every soul of man that doth evil! How bitterly does it pall the most exquisite of sensual pleasures to be stopt with the reflection, that *We are heaping up wrath against the day of wrath!*

^a Wisd. 2. 6. ^b Eccles. 11. 9.

Religion, we see, represents Man in a very different view, not only furnish'd with a rule of action, but obliged to observe it; It calls him to an account for the improvement of those talents which he is apt to squander; It leaves him not at liberty to break the Law of his reason and take his chance for the penalty, which may arise in the natural course of things, but intimidates his resolution by assuring him, that however the way of the wicked may prosper for the present, in the end it shall not go unpunished.

An ungenerous and mean incitement this to Virtue! it may be said — But is not the tendency to Vice and Oppression likewise ungenerous in itself? And what motive can be more effectual to convince the mean spirit of a lover of pleasure more than of God, than this, which is immediately address'd to his Selfishness? What so likely to secure a genuine uniform course of Obedience, as a regard to that Being, which is *the same to day, yesterday, and for ever*? — Not that every regard will be effectual. — Some *Moralists*, it seems, are for admitting God into their scheme, not in the dull and low notion of Rewarder and Avenger; but sometimes as the great Architect, sometimes as the Basis and chief

chief corner-stone of this beautiful fabrick the World; Nor is any exultation of Stile and Fancy spared to glorify him as such. In the contemplation of Nature, 'tis an amusing entertainment to these men to observe, that all it's parts are so constituted as to subsist upon the destruction of each other. — Animals prey on Animals and Plants, Man upon All. — In their serious melancholy mood of moralizing, their tenderness is shock'd at the thought of murdering a very Vegetable — to destroy an Animal is still but murder — 'tis Appetite commands the stroke; why then should it's dictates be disputed, if Man be destin'd for the victim? — 'Tis easy to say why they should, upon the principle of allowing a particular Providence: But if this be left out of the scheme, that fanciful affectation of tenderness and order in Theory, when men proceed to Action, swings back into cruelty and confusion in the same manner and for the same reason that Superstition does into Profaneness.

But have we then no security in the Law of *Reputation* and *Natural Temper*? — The Opinions of those about us may indeed sometimes teach and enforce what is right; but they may likewise, and in fact too often do

inculcate a contrary Lesson. — And as to goodness of Temper, how rarely do we find ourselves so entirely intrench'd hereby, but that some Evil steals upon us insensibly from a Quarter that we are not aware of?

A Benevolent man, 'tis true, has no disposition to Cruelty and Oppression, but has he none for Voluptuousness and Uncleaness? So long as he injures no man besides (and yet that is far from being always the case) he thinks himself at liberty to do injury to himself and to dishonour his own body. — Or perhaps he finds himself proof against these assaults from within — But has he no extravagant thirst after Riches? a thirst not a whit less unreasonable, or in fact less apt to put men upon wrong measures, for that the happiness of life does by no means consist in their abundance. — Or grant that neither the *Lust of the Flesh*, or the *Lust of the Eye* have gain'd the ascendant; But how then do his affections stand with regard to that world of iniquity, which lies in the *Pride of Life*? — In this region we find, what according to some favourite schemes will amply supply the want of Religion, the principle of *Honour* — a principle, which in proportion as it is indisposed to the *fear of God*, is always found to be *regardless of Men.*

Men. — A man of Honour of this kind has his view strongly directed towards himself and his own worth, and is thereby prompted to an insolent contempt of all besides himself: He will scorn to debase himself by doing a mean thing, but yet laugh at the charge of injustice: Ready we shall find him to vindicate the cause, to advance the interest of his Friend; but when do we see this Hero cautious of trampling upon the rights of others, who are not his Friends? Where do we find that benevolence of disposition, upon which he can be so pathetical when his Friend or his Family is concerned? Where do we find it relenting at the cries of the Oppressed; or shock'd with the sight of that Desolation, which his victorious rage has spread around him; or touch'd with the sense of those cruelties, whereby he preposterously endeavours to raise to himself a monument of Glory? — Honour, which we so much idolize, is found in fact to be little more than fidelity in observing the terms of a confederacy, which bad men enter into, to aggrandize themselves at the expence of others: And how dangerous it is to depend upon this brittle cord of Union, may be seen in the daily infraction of solemn Treaties, from the time that *Punick* Faith first be-

became a Proverb, to its now being taken up against a Neighbouring Nation. The subtle Politician, who despises all Religion, at length comes to make as little scruple of sacrificing Honour in it's turn: He then laughs at the simplicity of those, who regard the most sacred Oaths in any other light, than as a breath that is serviceable for a time, but soon passeth away and cometh not again. — The same Observations are applicable to combinations of Party-zeal; the entrance into which is too often nothing less than a solemn devoting of a man's self to be led captive, to be made the engine and tool of those, whom a wise man must be apt to despise, and a good one abhor.

But, Let Religious considerations be allow'd their place, and the charm is dissolved. — The Question occurs at the very entrance upon the scheme, *How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?* With what Conscience of Right and Equity, and consequently with what security against the vengeance of a just Governor of the World, can I think of advancing my own happiness by deserting the regular path of honest art and industry, and trampling upon the lives, the liberties, the fortunes and reputations of men made like
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myself, and equally objects of the divine regard ?

This thinking upon God, and *retaining him in our knowledge* indeed casts forth a baleful influence upon the schemes of Worldly wisdom, and is therefore apt to provoke the hatred and contempt of many Politicians : It is likewise too often complain'd of in private life, as a dead weight in the road to temporal prosperity, and as laying a good man under great disadvantages, when he is to act with those that are bad. — But it should be observed, that the miseries of Life, so far as they are occasion'd by the relative conduct of men towards each other, manifestly take their rise from a violation of the dictates and maxims of Religion : These have made an ample provision for the happiness of men, uniform and consistent in all it's parts. And tho' a good Citizen will acknowledge with all thankfulness the benefit of protection, which he receives from the due administration of Law; yet, with reverence be it said, It is not merely Law (for what a series of oppression may be carried on, what villany, too complicated to be unravell'd by legal process, and of too mix'd a nature to be defined precisely ?) it is not merely Law, but Conscience, as actuated by a sense
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of God and his Providence, that upholds the frame of Social happiness, and is the spring of mutual comfort and satisfaction: 'Tis this alone can keep the mind in a due state of tenderness and sensibility; 'Tis this must cloath us ^a *with bowells of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearance towards each other, forgiveness, and charity which is the bond of perfectness*. These Affections, and the Acts respectively consequent therefrom, are manifestly beyond the reach of Civil Laws and their sanctions. And to mention a relation or two, with which of all others the Domestick, that is, the main happiness of mankind is most intimately bound up and connected, those of Husband and Wife, Parent and Child; When we descend so low, as to estimate the completion of our Duty by the rule of Civil Laws, and bid our Conscience take it's acquittal from the Silence or the Sentence of the Judge upon the Bench, How flat and insipid must be the satisfaction, which those relations have a natural tendency to give us? And what a door is open'd for bitterness, clamour, hatred, variance, treachery, dishonour; — for hardness of heart, neglect and impro-

vidence in the Parent; — for irreverence, disobedience and disaffection in the Children?

The same observations might be extended to the other relations of social life, those of Governor and Subject, Master and Servant &c.

Where is the man but may find his moral improvement in calling off his attention at regular periods, whether from the earnestness of study, the hurry of business, or the pursuit of pleasure, in order to rectify the bias of his mind by *thinking upon God*? — a duty more especially incumbent upon Those, whose lot is cast in a fairer ground! For, considering how much of their behaviour the lower rank of mankind must necessarily borrow from their Superiors, what other effect can *Their* neglect of sacred Institutions have, but to stifle in their Inferiors all endeavours to *feel after God*? To imitate their Betters will seem but reputable; and if from thence they proceed to rapine and outrage, Men of fortune and distinction must blame themselves for breaking down those fences of moral honesty; As they contribute by their example to make men live without God in the world, they must not complain, if they find them dead unto righteousness and alive only unto sin.

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Tho' Vice and Irreligion should seem to be the last things, that a Reasonable Creature should think of claiming by way of Privilege; Yet, if it once becomes fashionable to consider them as such, a little observation may teach us, that the Common people will not easily submit to what Genteeler Persons esteem a Drudgery: They will be apt to demand at least an equal share of such privilege, tho' not able to husband their Vices with the discretion of wiser heads. — What infatuation is it then in Irreligious men to be assiduous in propagating the infection of their profaneness all around them? Do they not hereby destroy the main security of those means of happiness, which they themselves enjoy, namely, the religious tye upon the Consciences of Others *to eat their own bread with quietness*, and to be contented in that state, whereunto it hath pleased God to call them? — In vain do they flatter themselves, that it will be in their power to fix the limits of that corruption, which they have introduced. *Popery* indeed is a Gulph, in which profaneness and impiety may at length be found to terminate: But if not, 'Tis well, if Politicians do not find themselves under the necessity of introducing some equivalent Superstition, in order to quiet the minds, and

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stop the ravages of a People, that has no Religion.

II. Let us suppose the foundations of Morality, which Religion has laid, to be once broken up, and let History tell us of the dreadful consequences. — And here,

It ought certainly to be admitted as an argument of some weight, that the Voice of our *Country* (a voice, which our Freethinkers sometimes talk of reverencing like that of God, their only God) that this teaches us to impute the commission of such crimes, as principally occasion the returns of the present solemnity, to Men's not having the Fear of God before their Eyes, or, *their not retaining Him in their knowledge.*

But the reference, which the whole chapter, from which my text is taken, manifestly has to the state of the *Gentile World*, naturally directs our view to that Quarter.

We may be ask'd then, is the melancholy description, which follows the words of my text, really applicable to that wise, polite, and understanding people, the *Romans*, whose Virtues have been no less mark'd out for the imitation, than their Magnificence has been the envy, their Dominion the admiration of later ages? Or, Was the foundation of all this greatness really laid in Religion?

I answer, that it would carry me beyond the bounds of a discourse of this nature to trace out distinctly the rise and progress of irreligion and immorality among the *Romans*, in the order mention'd by *St Paul*. — it has been done at large by other hands^a.

Give me leave however to observe, that the dexterity of Atheism and Irreligion is shewn in nothing more, than in diverting men's indignation confessedly due to Vice, by some phantom of an excellence presented to the imagination in the stead of Virtue. Thus are our imaginations taught to cover over the Miseries and Vices of the *Individuals* of that mighty Empire by the picture of Prosperity and Greatness confessedly applicable to it in it's *collective* capacity. But as flourishing an appearance as it carried in this respect, yet few Histories will afford us a larger series of tumults and seditions, or more frequent instances of oppression, even at those times when it's Liberty and Glory seem'd best established. — Let us then, as we are often called upon, with awful reverence, if You please, reflect upon the Majesty of *Rome*; Let us view the splendor of it's mighty Empire, and

^a *Conr. Adami cit. ap. Wolfium. ad loc.*

that deluge of Wealth, which flowed into it from every Quarter: But let us on the other hand acknowledge, how little safety that envied Constitution in fact afforded to the best of Citizens? How unable to protect him, who (if ever *Rome* afforded one) was certainly the Parent of his Country, how childishly frantick in the banishment of *Cicero*, how servile as well as fickle in his restoration! Let us consider likewise the immediate support of that national splendor, which provokes our envy, that it was not the wealth arising from the fair arts of honest Industry, but the Spoils of the whole Universe besides. Let the Admirer hereof be asked, whether He himself would willingly contribute his share, his life and fortune, towards erecting anew that magnificent Empire? — if not — let him own, that his reverence of that name of dignity, a *Roman Senate*, is founded on the secret wish, that He himself could have been one of the Number, and come in for his share of the Dominion and Spoils: When he draws invidious parallels between Our Constitution and this of which we are speaking, Let him acknowledge, that it is not that of *Rome*, which he really approves, but the circumstances of his condition in his own, which he dislikes.

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In shewing the connection between Immorality and Irreligion from Historical fact we are under great disadvantages. A Christian Writer, it seems, is a Party concerned, and thought by the Atheist to be under that infatuation, which it is his glory to have avoided. Nay, the judgment of an *Heathen* Historian likewise is frequently set aside and invalidated by his giving into the accounts of prodigies &c. However, it happens fortunately upon the present question, that this truth is confirmed by a Writer, whose judiciousness of reflection has always given him recommendation to the student in civil policy, I mean *Thucydides*; who expressly refers that Licentiousness of every kind, that Voluptuousness, Idleness and Outrage, which prevail'd among the *Athenians* for a time, to a violent shock which had been given to their belief of a Divine Providence, from observing the indiscriminate calamities, which happen'd equally to them, that worshipped the Gods, and those that worshipped them not. -- And wherever we suppose the foundation of such disaffection and disloyalty toward GOD to lye, the consequences of it will always be the

* Thucyd. L. 2. §. 53.

same: Nay they are likely to be more dangerously licentious, when men's passions have been roused into a rebellion against GOD by the wanton arts of Ridicule, — when Gayety hath as it were flush'd them with success, than where the edge of Appetite hath lost it's keenness, where the passionate part of us is in a manner dispirited, and sunk under the weight, or apprehension of calamities.

From the same Historian^a let me cite another character, which may deserve the consideration of some of our *Δοκιμασταί*, our *Refiners* in matters of Religion, who are for delivering over by banter and ridicule to an unthinking populace, what they modestly apprehend to be the established errors of their country. — *Alcibiades*, it seems, had just learnt enough from the excellent instructions of *Socrates* to discern, that there was something very wrong in the religious institutions of *Athens*, but not enough to settle his own thoughts upon a surer and more rational foundation. — The little restraint, which Superstition might give, (and some at least it always will give) being now removed, the transition became easy into a course of lasciviousness and

^a Thucyd. L. 6, §. 15, 16.

debauchery^a. With a plausible air of assurance we may suppose him exulting at the head of the profligate Youth, and corrupting their morals; now carrying on his political schemes under the shew of piety^b, and soon after foremost in giving affront^c to the object of his Country-men's religious veneration. — In Councils of state none more^d pathetic in expressions of Love to his Country, or more assiduous to work himself up to the helm of Government, by complaints of mismanagement and male-administration. But no sooner has he the chagrin to receive a check in his ambition, but we find him equally^e busy in sowing the seeds of ruin to his Country, compassing Sea and Land to make an enemy against it, and himself deeply engaged in all the arts of treachery.

His great abilities gave him doubtless much

^a *Luxuriosus, dissolutus, libidinosus, intemperans.* Corn. Nep. in vit. Alcib. c. 1. ^b *In domo suâ mysteria facere dicebatur, quod nefas erat more Atheniensium; idque non ad religionem sed ad conjurationem persuadere existimabatur.* c. 2. ^c *Quod sacra violâset, reum fecerunt.* c. 3. & Thucyd. L. 6. §. 53. & 61. ^d *Oras. cons. Niciam.* ^e *Lacedæmonem demigravit. Hic (ut ipse prædicare consueverat) non adversus patriam, sed adversus inimicos suos bellum gessit. — Itaque hujus consilio Lacedæmonii Deceleam in Atticâ munierunt, præsidioque ibi posito in obsidione Athenas tenuerunt. Ejusdem opera Ioniam à societate aversum Atheniensium* c. 3. & Thuc. L. 6. §. 91. & L. 8. §. 12. &c.

advantage in advancing his Country's welfare ; But how dangerous are great abilities, uninfluenc'd and unsupported by a good principle ! Like poisonous drugs judiciously applied in Medicine, they have indeed by the direction of Providence sometimes given a surprising turn in favour of national welfare, but in ordinary use they must be fatal : 'Tis the good principles and pious dispositions of the generality, that, like wholesome common food, alone can be depended upon to give lasting health and vigour to a national constitution.

I believe I may safely leave this question of Fact, whether Irreligion be not productive of Immorality, in these times, to Your own observation. We find that dying Criminals reflect bitterly upon their habitual abuse of that portion of time, which should be consecrated to God's more immediate honour and service. Hither they refer the source and spring of all their wickedness. — Nor let the simplicity of these confessions preclude us from considering the real truth which they contain. In those, whom the liberal hand of providence hath released from the painful necessity of procuring their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, such robbery of God is

is doubly criminal: For they can have no plea for perverting this season to the wantonness of their diversions. Nor is the profane neglect less dangerous in corrupting the minds of men of exalted Station, tho' the crimes which follow such corruption fall not under the stroke of civil Justice. Indeed the irreligious man for his own sake will endeavour to make a composition with the World for his vices by the shew of some virtue, that he can practise at little expence to himself. And if of easy fortune, he is certainly under less temptation to be injurious to others, and has great advantages by acts of beneficence and affected condescension to soften the resentment and censure of those about him. But what provision has his Virtue within itself? Where do we ever find him backward at an immorality, to which a real temptation calls him onward?

Nor let our imaginations be too much struck with the recrimination of our Adversaries, that Religion is in fact by no means an effectual remedy for the disorders complained of. A truly good man may indeed fall from his own steadfastness, but what is the occasion of his falling? what else, but his neglect to retain God in his knowledge? We confess the

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weakness of our nature, *Christianity* constantly reminds us of it: It indulges neither our Sloth nor our humour, but calls in both the terrors and mercies of God, to quicken our industry to live soberly, righteously, and honestly in all our ways.

And here it is worth Your notice, with what dissingenuity and unfairness, the Advocate for Irreligion is apt to state the question, when he attempts to convince his Reader, that Atheism is no bar to a Man's merit or virtue. You will find it taken for granted^a, that good sense, probity and benevolence are united in the irreligious man; on the other hand, that the Christian is a meer composition of passion, false-zeal, gloomy discontent in himself, and illnature towards others. — Now as it is certain, that the Advocates for Irreligion are by no means remarkable for

^a Dissert. II. on *Tacitus*, &c. §. 10. enlarges upon the reflections: — Which is the better instructor, He who has store of Faith, but wants Virtue and abounds not in good sense; or He who wants the first, but abounds in knowledge and the rules of righteousness? — In *China* the *Mandarins* have no Religion at all — the *Bonzes* or Priests are vicious, sordid, base, and void of every virtue. — against this Monarchy set the *Pope's* Dominions. — Make a comparison between two particulars, a Heathen guided by Reason, and a Christian by passion and false-zeal. — The good sense of an Atheist is preferable to the mistakes of a good Christian. — See also *Characteristicks of Atheism*.

that benevolence, which they would seem to praise, so in general, the plausibleness of the Atheist, and the unseemliness of the Christian may be accounted for from such other circumstances, as I have already hinted at, without bringing Religion into the case. It is therefore a presumption, as void of modesty as of truth, not to suppose at least an equal share of natural and acquired endowments in the Christian as in the Atheist; And upon that supposition, I have above assign'd the reasons, why Religion will in all likelihood turn the scale of merit much in favour of the former.

And as for those Debaucheries and Cruelties, which have been practis'd in *Popish* Countries, where our Adversaries seem to talk as if Religion was carried even to an extreme, and therefore might seem to promise a most absolute controul of the whole set of vicious passions — The objection in truth stands thus — False and unreasonable notions of GOD will be ineffectual to prevent; nay, in many cases strongly promote what is vicious and immoral, and *therefore* true and worthy thoughts must do so likewise: — a *form* of godliness may be had without any benefit derived to the moral character, and

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therefore the reality is of no power to purge the Conscience, and preserve it void of offence.

But further, Let us trace back the instances of habitual debauchery and cruelty usually cited upon these occasions, and we shall generally find circumstances enough to prove, that the discredit is brought upon Religion by some pretended deserter from the camps of ungodliness, who becomes all things to every man, who will even put on the garb and attire of Religion, that he may destroy the more. — It should therefore be remember'd, that the Antidote, which we are proposing as preventive of Immorality, is not a sanctified aspect, a precise gesture, or meer assiduity at the forms of Devotion, but the real retaining of God in men's knowledge. — So that the pains, which the Enemies of Religion are so frequently pleased to give themselves, to draw forth the sanctified Villain from his Cell, and the sarcasms utter'd upon these occasions with so much sprightliness of Satyr on Religion, are all vain, and fall beside the mark: 'Tis really proclaiming the very truth I have been illustrating, and vouching it by instances produced from amongst themselves.

III. But

III. But then I must observe further, that since Religion is a habit, and tho' the surmises of natural conscience suggest both that God exists, and is *not far from every one of us*, yet is there great need that these seeds of religion be duly cultivated, and that our disposition towards it be strengthen'd and improved.

To prevent the mischiefs of Irreligion, the Wisdom of our Legislature hath added the Sanction of a civil Establishment to Christianity, and thereby provided the remedy of publick Institution and Instruction for all orders and degrees of Men.

Here again, we cannot help observing upon the double-dealing of our Adversaries. In one breath they shall deny Religion to be of any service at all in finishing the useful character in civil life; and in the next, we shall have them resolving all Religion into the device of Statesmen on account of the eminent degree, in which it approves itself subservient to promote that regularity and order, which is requisite to civil happiness, and which the terror of human Laws is ineffectual to secure.

When, or how far it may be proper for the civil Magistrate to interpose with judicial penalties to vindicate the honour of these Laws

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and more especially to restrain the overflowings of Ungodliness, must be left to those whose Province it is. So difficult it may be to ascertain particular cases with precision and accuracy, — so much may be plausibly urged in favour of free and impartial debate upon religious matters, that we cannot but acknowledge it to be commendable in a Judge to imitate the lenity of the Law which he administers, and to allow to every man the sanctuary and protection due to Innocence till evident proof shall extort the sentence of condemnation — a benefit, which our Constitution intends should be universal, and which can not be superseded without manifest hazard to those that are truly good and virtuous! — But still the Law, considered as the Voice of our Country, authoritatively forbidding all ^a *Blasphemy* against God, Christianity and the *Holy Scriptures*; ^b *All profanation or neglect* of GOD's Ordinances, his ^c *Name*, his *Day*, ^d *his Worship*, most certainly breathes a spirit, wherewithal it should be the glory of every true lover of his Country to animate

^a St. 9. & 10. Will. III. c. 32. ^b St. 1 Edw. VI. c. 1. St. Eliz. c. 1. ^c St. 3 Jac. I. c. 21. St. 13 Car. II. c. 9. St. 6. & 7. W. III. c. 11. ^d St. 29 Car. II. c. 7. ^e St. 1 Eliz. c. 2. St. 23 Eliz. c. 1. St. 3 Jac. I. 3. 4. St. 1 W. & M. Sess. 1. c. 18.

himself. Let the Law in these matters be considered either as the injunction of a *Parent*, or the counsel of a *Friend*; in these views shall we be led to resent with all the indignation, that the Communion of civil society can admit, every insult that is offered to Religion; We shall inflict the penalty of disgrace and infamy upon all such endeavours to seduce others into irreligion and profaneness, as indeed artfully evade the animadversion of Law, and yet officiously make bare their malignity before the tribunal of private judgment. — Let men of approved character and sincere dispositions towards Religion be but resolute enough to forego the praise of being *good-natured companions*; that is, in the present case, of being so mild as to bear insulting, so polite as never to contradict, and so complaisant as to join in what they do condemn: Let them but avow their real sense of Religion, and their declaration might probably retrieve it to it's due influence upon men's lives, and preserve their Country as respectable for the Moral Virtues of it's inhabitants, as it is envied for it's Wealth, Dominion, and happy Constitution.

But alas! what regard for true praise, the praise of being good men, is usually found in

those, who are lost to a sense of Religion? And what foundation have we of securing to our posterity even those temporal blessings, which are the glory of our times, if we throw up our pretensions to those virtues, which alone can give them stability? The Vices, which threaten Us, carry indeed a well-sounded aspect, and by the help of some civil names whereby with too much indulgence we are apt to call them, viz. *Liberty, Generosity, Gallantry, and Pleasure*, are becoming Epidemical. But will their warmest Advocate venture to ensure us against the natural effects of *Licentiousness, Extravagance and Luxury, Lewdness and Idleness*? (for these are their real names) — Can he not see that there is generally at the bottom of all this a contracted spirit of Selfishness? and can he flatter himself that these vices will not terminate here in the same rapine, oppression and confusion, as were visible in the decay of *Roman* grandeur, the example whereof is usually cited upon other occasions, and that with great efficacy to authorize the indulgence of a vitious taste? — No. — The Irreligious man has suffered himself to be wrought into an opinion, that this World is his portion, and that his business is to take his pastime therein; And if
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the instruments of pleasure do not fail himself, (and rather than they shall fail him, He is ready to barter away all pretensions to Liberality and Justice) He departs in peace, and leaves posterity to feel the consequences.

Such friendship of the World must be enmity with God: And it is much to the honour of the Clergy to have such destroyers of national welfare generally for their Enemies, never for their Friends: In consequence whereof it rarely happens, but that the way of their Exhortations to sobermindedness is foreclosed by evil report and misrepresentation. — But at present, the complaint of dissoluteness of principle and licentiousness in practice is by no means peculiar to the Clergy, 'tis general; And the effects thereof are either actually felt, or anticipated in the apprehensions of every Parent, that has affection enough to be solicitous for his Childrens welfare, and sense enough to observe upon what passes in the World, — What dangers are likely to encompass them at their first setting out in life, from the vicious examples and injurious treatment of others, — What temptations will invite them to waste away their substance in riotous living, — to decline from the open road of industry and frugality, and thereby

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be reduced to the unhappy dilemma, either to seek out some by-path to wealth and greatness, or to languish away in poverty and disgrace. — And what expedient has ever been devised sufficient to carry men through these temptations, but the habitual fear and love of GOD?

It is to be hoped therefore, that neither the flattery nor the reproaches of our Enemies will be ever able to separate Religion from Learning in the institutions of this place. Possible indeed it is for them to subsist in a state of Separation; But as it must always prove dangerous to the cause of true Religion to stand divested of the succours of Learning, and especially to have it for its adversary, unless supported by such miraculous interposition as assisted the first preachers of the Gospel, so nothing can threaten so much danger to the true welfare and interests of mankind, as Learning when at enmity with or detach'd from Religion: It is a weapon that mankind can much better spare from among themselves, than have it lodged in hands that will misapply it. — Call it narrowing the minds of Youth, and damping its sprightliness! — But what is the end of all laws human and divine but to direct the ig-

norance, to curb the sallies, and controll the
 licentious efforts of unruly spirits? — The
 wretchedness of Party-zeal, the knowledge
 of the World, an acquaintance with it's fol-
 lies and vices, will soon enough, alas! too
 soon obtrude themselves upon us in every
 scene of publick life. But if the happiness
 of individuals does in most cases, as the true
 interest of the publick always does depend
 upon personal virtues, how commendable is
 that institution, which impresses a bias to-
 wards what is lovely and of good report? —
 biases! equally lasting in it's duration, as ex-
 tensive in it's influence upon our Conduct
 publick as well as private; at once securing
 the man of business in the ways of diligence
 and probity, the Patriot in his Integrity, and
 the Subject in his Loyalty.

The *present* critical juncture of our National
 affairs might naturally enough lead me to en-
 large my exhortations, did This Place want any
 exhortation, upon the excellence and advantage
 of the Virtues I have just been mentioning.

That Honesty, Diligence and Contentment
 in our stations is the best Policy, is a maxim
 verified by general experience; and it is a
 maxim more particularly adapted to the cir-
 cumstances of a learned retirement.

As to the other Duties, which we more immediately owe our Country and our King, the present is a Season, in which it would be a false modesty, even in the mildest disposition, — it would be giving spirit and vigour to an insolent Enemy, not to declare ourselves with openness. — But, whatever scope it might afford an Orator to paint the restlessness of that ambitious Monarchy, whose Glory it has constantly been to squander away the blood and fortunes of it's Subjects in disturbing the peace of it's Neighbours, and enlarging the field of it's Oppressions, It would be affronting to the bravery of any *Englishman* to suppose him capable to be deluded by any specious promises from that Quarter, or dismay'd by it's threatnings. — It would be no less affronting to the Understandings of You that hear me, was I to suppose You insensible of that close and intimate union, which there is between our most valuable interests and the continued possession of the Crown of these Realms; in the sacred Person and August House of his present Majesty.

Let me then leave the consideration of these Duties inforced upon Your minds by the strong and powerful principle of a *Religious Fear, the Oath of God that is upon us;*

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Let our thoughts be directed onward to that tribunal, where every one of us shall be finally impleaded for what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil.

Let us in view of that tremendous situation continually *set God before us*, and regulate our behaviour as in all it's parts open to his all-seeing Eye; consider in every thing that we do or think, as the *Apostle* advises, that the *Judge standeth before the door*. Happy will he be, whose prudence can at every instant of performing an action anticipate the view in which Reflection will present it afterwards; who makes it his endeavour to cherish such a sense of God upon his mind, as neither to tempt him to withdraw his Grace in this World, nor his Mercy in that which is to come!



F I N I S.